

# *Safe from the Start*

A Community Collaboration on the Co-Occurrence  
of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence

## **Guidelines on the Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District–Johnson County, Kansas**

*January 2004*

### **Executive Summary**

In September 2001, the *Safe From the Start* project was convened with the first meeting of the dedicated professionals and community leaders who formed the project's Leadership Team. Over the next two years, this community collaboration sought to identify ways to improve the response to family violence in Johnson County.

The goal is for all victims of abuse to achieve the outcomes of safety, stability and well-being and to hold perpetrators accountable for their abusive behavior through the provision of services and /or sanctions. The project sought to increase the community's capacity to identify, in a timely manner, families and children experiencing violence in their homes with the goal of returning all victims to safety.

The project created the *Guidelines on the Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment* to be used by professionals, law enforcement and community organizations to improve the response to family violence. The *Guidelines* feature recommendations and principles in the sections summarized below. Topics in the *Guidelines* include: Guiding Principles, Cultural Competency, Screening Response Guidelines, Service Integration Strategies, Training Plan on co-occurrence, Batterers Intervention and on-going Project Monitoring.

#### ***Safe from the Start* GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

The *Safe from the Start* Leadership Team developed GUIDING PRINCIPLES that are considered fundamental to the development of the *Guidelines on the Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment*. The GUIDING PRINCIPLES will be used on an on-going basis to continue to evaluate the following recommendations and to refine and improve the recommendations needed in the future. GUIDING PRINCIPLES exist on the following topics: Safety, Information Sharing, Child Witnessing, Co-Occurrence Service Planning, Perpetrators, and Cultural Competency.

#### **Cultural Competency – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Culture in all its attributes intersects with family violence in unique and fundamental ways. To be successful in the project vision of making "Johnson County a community where people live free from family violence," efforts must be made to strengthen cultural competence – the ability of individuals and systems to respond effectively to people of all cultures.

##### Organizational Leadership and Training

Safe from the Start participating organizations will:

1. Make a commitment to identify the racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups in Johnson County and then develop greater understanding of those cultures, especially as related to the issues and values related to family violence.

2. Conduct an organizational cultural competence self-assessment by seeking input from staff, consumers and relevant community groups to develop a plan to improve organizational competence.
3. Support the professional development of their employees in the area of cultural competency. Organizations are encouraged to identify annual training opportunities to enhance employees' skills and understanding of diverse cultures, especially on areas related to family violence.

#### Clients with limited English proficiency

Safe from the Start recognizes the significant efforts of the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District to make interpreters available to court involved families. To further advance work with clients who have limited English proficiency, Safe from the Start participating agencies will:

4. Seek to not utilize underage children as interpreters and, whenever possible, will not rely on any relative or same-household member for language interpretation.
5. Make all reasonable efforts to have printed materials available in languages other than English. In particular, materials that explain U.S. law, the legal process and the rights of persons in the court system should be available. Court-involved families in Johnson County need more access to materials that are clear and readily understandable. In addition, whenever possible, interpreters should be available to explain materials in recognition that literacy is an issue for some court-involved families. A hope for the future is that victim sessions can be offered in other languages or through interpreters at the courthouse.

#### Immigration Status

The Safe from the Start project members want to acknowledge that “immigrant women are not only particularly vulnerable to domestic partner abuse, but are also less likely to seek assistance.” Safe from the Start participating organizations:

6. Recognize that adoption of these guidelines by participating agencies will not override existing agency policies on identification and reporting of undocumented residents.
7. Urge professionals responding to or providing services for situations of co-occurrence to bear in mind that client service is paramount to providing for the safety for all family members affected by violence, regardless of immigration status.
8. Suggest that, unless required by agency policy, professionals and agencies involved in the identification of co-occurrence and subsequent client services will not require a social security number from clients.
9. Recommend that family violence service organizations educate themselves on recent immigration law. New immigration laws were passed in the early 1990's because, previously, the immigration process tended to worsen the problems of immigrants experiencing domestic violence. Among others, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) changes the immigration process for battered immigrants and their children who have not yet received permanent residency. This body of law holds implications for current service advocacy strategies so that the immigration rights of battered or abused immigrants and their children are preserved.

#### **Screening Response – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In order to promote greater safety and stability for families experiencing violence, Safe from the Start recommends that community institutions across the spectrum screen earlier for family violence. Organizations at the levels of First Responders, Direct Service Professionals and Other Community Professionals are encouraged to:

1. Use these guidelines to screen for family violence and its affect on safety for all family members, recognizing that not only the presenting victim, but also other adult or child victims may need to be protected from harm.
2. Make regular use of the screening tools created for adult caregivers and children. These tools were

designed to be user-friendly by professionals in identifying co-occurrence with both potential child and adult victims of violence.

3. Implement the safety procedures recommended in the guidelines with the intent to increase the capacity of this community to develop the differential, collaborative responses that will lead to greater safety for all members of the families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment.
4. Incorporate the new collaborative referral design suggested at all three levels to enhance this community's capacity to intervene more effectively and earlier with families experiencing domestic violence and/or child maltreatment, including:
  - For adult-related concerns: Safely, but actively refer adult victims and/or caregivers to the Safehome domestic violence hotline at 913/262-2868.
  - For child-related concerns: In order to expedite services to children and families, suspected child abuse or other child safety concerns are to be reported to the SRS local hotline at 913/826-7321 or SRS's state hotline at 1-800-922-5330. SRS will review reports to properly assess the risk to the children. This screening service by SRS does not mean that a case will be opened to investigate child maltreatment. SRS's current policy affirms a fundamental principle of responding to co-occurrence, namely that children will remain in the care of the non-offending parent whenever possible, and that child witnessing of domestic violence does not automatically meet the definition of child in need of care. SRS will determine if additional investigation is warranted and/or make referrals to other services that assist families in crisis. Law enforcement is encouraged to concurrently forward adult domestic violence criminal reports where children are present in the home to the local SRS intake FAX at 913/826-7482.

**Service Integration Strategies – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The *Safe from the Start* project seeks to increase the capacity of this community to develop new collaborative and differential responses that will lead to greater safety for families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment. Integration strategies include:

1. Family Court Coordination Plan: A plan was developed to provide greater communication and coordination when one family has multiple cases pending in various courts.
2. Overland Park SRS Office and Safehome Memorandum of Agreement: The purpose of this agreement is to more effectively serve families where both domestic violence and child abuse/neglect occur through improved communication, a better understanding of each other's roles and clarification of expectations.
3. Safehome Membership on Multidisciplinary Team: Safehome staff will serve as a resource for information on domestic violence issues for those cases that are staffed by the Team.
4. Domestic Violence Response at JIAC: JIAC staff will be trained to use Direct Service Professional screening response guidelines and Safehome will make staff or trained volunteers available to be called to come to JIAC to work with adult domestic violence victims.
5. Domestic Violence Response at Sunflower House: Sunflower staff will be trained to use Direct Service Professional screening response guidelines and Safehome will make staff or trained volunteers available to be called to come to Sunflower House to work with adult domestic violence victims.

**Training Plan – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*Safe from the Start* recognizes that a fundamental step in implementing these guidelines will be staff training on the guidelines and follow-up to make sure that the training is put into practice.

Participating organizations will be encouraged to:

1. Incorporate *Safe from the Start* training into their employee orientation/training for all ‘front-line’ staff.
2. Participate in an annual review of how to incorporate co-occurrence training into their existing programs. Participating organizations are encouraged to provide any updates of the *Guidelines* to the internal and external training providers that they use.
3. Identify agencies that provide regular training to community professionals and encourage them to incorporate the *Co-Occurrence Guidelines* into their programs, and to sensitize, educate the broader community about co-occurrence.

**Batterers Intervention – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Holding perpetrators accountable for their behavior is of critical importance. The following recommendations reflect both a review of, and suggestions for ways to strengthen current practice:

1. The court will hold batterers responsible by assigning batterers to the most appropriate level of treatment intervention.
2. Mechanisms to increase communication between batterer intervention providers and probation staff were established.
3. More cross training among employees associated with the Domestic Violence Court is recommended.
4. Parenting information should be incorporated into batterer intervention curriculum for all offenders.

**Project Monitoring – *Safe from the Start* PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*Safe from the Start* recommends that a set of key indicators be collected on a calendar year basis starting in 2004 to monitor trends related to the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment. The data is to be submitted to and maintained by the Justice Information Management System (JIMS).

*Safe from the Start* Project Conveners:

Judge Allen Slater  
Johnson County Courthouse  
10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District  
913/715-3830  
[allen.slater@jocogov.org](mailto:allen.slater@jocogov.org)

Mary Cole  
Chief of Social Services  
KS Social & Rehabilitation Services  
913/826-7462  
[mlc@srskansas.org](mailto:mlc@srskansas.org)

Sharon Katz  
Executive Director  
Safehome  
913/432-9300, Ext. 15  
[skatz@safehome-ks.org](mailto:skatz@safehome-ks.org)

Rise Haneberg  
Director of Court Services  
10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District  
913/324-6927  
[rise.haneberg@jocogov.org](mailto:rise.haneberg@jocogov.org)

*Contact Information:*  
10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court Services  
1255 E. 119<sup>th</sup> Street  
Olathe, Kansas 66061